

*Food and Drugs Act***PUBLIC BILLS****FOOD AND DRUGS ACT****AMENDMENT RESPECTING LISTING OF
INGREDIENTS**

Mr. Max Saltzman (Waterloo) moved the second reading and reference to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs of Bill C-12, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (listing of ingredients).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill was first introduced in 1966 at the urging of many people who had written to me, as they had written to other members of the house, indicating the difficulties they were having in terms of identifying ingredients in food and drugs to which they were allergic. The purpose of this bill, as stated in the explanatory note, is to amend the Food and Drugs Act to require producers of food and drugs placed on the Canadian market to accurately and completely list all ingredients on the labels of their products, as far as possible.

We in Canada are somewhat remiss in not insisting upon ingredient labelling, and as a result a number of anomalies have appeared. For instance, food manufactured in the United States and exported to Canada by the parent of a branch plant in this country bears accurate labelling because the U.S. government has passed legislation which is more progressive in this regard than ours. Therefore there is the curious situation that products that are similar to each other, almost identical in some cases, if made in Canada frequently have no labelling of ingredients whereas they do if made in the United States. On the other hand, there have been instances where Canadian manufacturers market their products in Canada without labelling the ingredients because the government does not require them to do so; yet when exporting the self-same product they have gone to considerable trouble to label the ingredients in order to comply with the regulations of the country to which they are exporting. Therefore I think it is time this state of affairs was cleared up.

I believe that Canadian consumers, particularly those who suffer from allergies, are entitled to information that is important to them, and it is for this reason that I present this bill to the house, hoping it will gain support from other hon. members. Some members have become aware of my intention to introduce Bill C-12 and they have indicated their support and written me to that effect.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker.]

Some of them have personal knowledge of the difficulties that are created by inadequate labelling for people who suffer from allergies.

Many people in this country suffer from allergies, and these allergies take many forms. It is not my intention this evening to detail the various kinds of allergies and the difficulties that they create; I think much of this is common knowledge to all of us. We all know from our own personal acquaintances that this problem exists. We all know people who have to be very careful about the kind of food they buy for their children because their children are allergic to certain things. We have gone to restaurants with friends who have had to question either the waiter or the cook about almost every item of food brought to the table. There is not a great deal we can do to remedy this situation, but of course people do not spend all their time eating in restaurants. However, there is considerable work that I think we can do for those who purchase food for use at home and who require to know what the food contains.

What makes the problem even more acute in this day and age is that the friendly corner grocer is no longer a ubiquitous figure. There was a time when one could go into a small store and ask the assistant: "What's in this, John?", and generally the assistant would know. Or one could go to the corner drug-store or to the fish market and get some idea of what was in the food being sold. However, today everything is sold off the shelf. We have silent merchandising. People simply walk into a supermarket and pick products off the shelves.

Unfortunately, manufacturers of food products today are not nearly as concerned about informing the public as to what they are selling as was the small merchant of yesterday. Their chief concern is to attract the public, to put some bright colouring on the labelling or packaging so that we can instantly grab what we want. Industrial psychologists have told manufacturers that their products must have more eye appeal than others. They say very little about providing the public with information on the ingredients. As one supermarket operator remarked to a committee of this house, "You wouldn't want to take all the romance out of life by getting too factual about things." I think we have had a little too much romancing in our supermarkets. We have had too much psychic benefit, too much puffery, as they politely describe what they are doing. It is about time our consumers were given the right to information.